Introduction: Why Bother?

James Leggott

Chris Morris is one of the most singular and controversial figures in British comedy. In various roles as performer, writer, director and collaborator, he has challenged boundaries of taste and acceptability, altered perceptions of current affairs broadcasting, moral panics and celebrity culture, and pushed conventional television genres such as sitcom and sketch comedy to the limits of possibility. He has been labelled the 'most hated man in Britain'[1] for producing the 'sickest television show ever', [2] in the case of Brass Eye (Channel 4, 1997; 2001), and has been commonly described as a 'media terrorist' in relation to his hoaxing of celebrities, politicians, broadcasters and members of the public.[3] His inscrutability as a public figure has won both respect and opprobrium. One reviewer went as far as speculating that 'Chris Morris might possibly be God'.[4]

Morris began his career as a disc jockey (DJ) on regional radio, honing his technical and performance style from the mid-1980s onwards through stints on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, BBC Radio Bristol (where he hosted a show called No Known Cure between 1987 and 1990), Greater London Radio and later BBC Radio 1. By the time he came to prominence as anchor-man of the BBC Radio 4 series On the Hour (1991-2), he had developed a highly distinctive on-air persona, a skill at pitch-perfect mimicry of musical and presentational styles, a flair for surrealist flights of fancy, and – most problematically for some of his bosses – a nose for mischief-making that included 'prank calls', re-edited material and hoax interviews with celebrities, politicians and the general public. On the Hour was a ground-breaking satire of news

programmes that established its team of writers and performers – which included Stewart Lee, Richard Herring, Steve Coogan, Patrick Marber, David Schneider, Doon Mackichan, Rebecca Front and the producer Armando Iannucci - as one of the most important forces in British comedy of the 1990s. Both On the Hour and its equally successful television transfer The Day Today (BBC 2, 1994) were astonishingly comprehensive in their skewering of the clichés and pomposities of broadcasting, not just in current affairs, but in sport, soap operas, documentaries, youth programming, weather forecasts, candid camera shows, archival television and music videos, among others. Morris took centre stage in the role of an aloof, disdainful presenter, prone to bullying co-presenters and interviewees, and adopting a heightened speech pattern that echoed the cadences and odd emphases of well-known British news presenters such as Jeremy Paxman and Michael Burke. Morris's next major project, Brass Eye, was broadcast as a six-part series in 1997 and then a one-off 'special' in 2001. Written by Morris in collaboration with a number of others, including Peter Baynham, David Quantick, Jane Bussmann, Arthur Mathews and Graham Lineham, Brass Eye purported to be a current affairs magazine-style show focussing upon specific topics of moral or social concern: animals, drugs, science, sex, crime, general 'moral' decline and paedophilia. Alongside the well-crafted and often minitaurist spoofs of national, regional and international broadcasting of the late 1990s - from sensationalist talk and crime shows to reality television - was a greater emphasis upon 'stings' where public figures, ranging from sportsmen and politicians to television personalities and pop stars, were persuaded to lend their support to fictitious and self-evidently ridiculous campaigns; for example, the MP David Amess raised questions in Parliament about the 'made-up' drug Cake, the actor and writer Steven Berkoff demonstrated the dangers of 'heavy electricity' with a table of household ornaments,

and the DJ Dr Fox was made to expound on the genetic connections between crabs and paedophiles. Although only given brief runs, The Day Today and Brass Eye would lay the foundations for the styles and techniques of prominent comedians such as Ricky Gervais and Sacha Baron-Cohen, as well as bearing some influence on satirical programmes like The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (Comedy Central, 1996-) and The Onion News Network (IFC, 2011-).

The controversies around the broadcast of Brass Eye and later its 2001 special - the subject of tabloid frenzy in the UK and one of the most complained about programmes in British broadcasting history - was in contrast to the muted reception of the no-less adventurous and taboo-breaking 'ambient' sketch show Blue Jam, broadcast as three six-part series on BBC Radio 1 between 1997 and 1999 to minimal fanfare but to a warm reception from connoisseurs of experimental, boundary-pushing comedy. Each hour-long episode was an intricately woven flow of music, comedy sketches involving a small repertory of frequent Morris collaborators (principally Kevin Eldon, Julia Davis, Mark Heap, David Cann and Amelia Bullmore), deadpan story monologues and surreal introductions/closings by Morris, fake jingles and 'club music' guides, and a handful of 'prank' celebrity interviews. Although the show incorporated some elements of Brass Eye's iconoclasm, media satire, verbal excesses and assault on good taste, Blue Jam placed greater emphasis on sonic and linguistic disorientation, hypnotising its late-night listener into the same states of somnambulant detachment or paranoia displayed by many of the characters in the sketches themselves. The show returned obsessively to scenarios involving madness, depression, rogue doctors, irresponsible parents and endangered children, but whereas Brass Eye mercilessly critiqued the mediatisation of moral panics, Blue Jam was more interested in individuals facing knotty moral tests: a notably grotesque example is a

sketch where a plumber, called upon by a disturbed mother of a dead infant, agrees for a fee to re-animate the baby with pipes. Although some of the sketches involving individuals coming up against institutional forces evoked traditions of popular comedy (for example, 'doctor doctor' jokes) as well as political and surrealist comedy, their emphasis upon psychic damage pushed them into far darker territory. For example, a scenario involving a man complaining, with increasing despair, about the lizards emanating from his television set can be taken as a particularly nightmarish take on the Monty Python 'dead parrot' sketch.[5]

The show's translation onto television, the six-part Jam, was broadcast on Channel 4 in 2000. Shorn of the full-length musical links of the radio predecessor, but repeating much of the material and using the same performers, Jam was closer in format to the traditional half-hour sketch-show, but deployed an assortment of unsettling visual manipulations – slow motion, missing frames, degradation, CGI – as equivalent devices of estrangement. Such devices were taken to further extremes in a 'remix' version of the show, entitled Jaaaaam, which was made for late-night broadcast. One of the Blue Jam monologues, about a dog apparently getting the better of its sitter, was turned into a twelve-minute film, My Wrongs #8245-8249 & 117 (2003), directed and written by Morris, and the first film release by Warp, an independent British label hitherto most associated with exploratory experimental music, which had also released a compilation CD of Blue Jam sketches in 2000. As with the 'lizards' sketch described above, My Wrongs pushes a potentially whimsical conceit into dark, Kafka-esque territory. The main character (played by Paddy Considine), tasked with looking after his friend's Doberman, Rothko (voiced by Morris himself), imagines – or so it would seem – the dog informing him he is on trial for a lifetime of 'wrongs', which stretch back to some sort of childish indiscretion of

parental infidelity. After being impelled by the animal to snatch a baby from a Christening ceremony, his already fragile mental state appears utterly fractured, in keeping with the despairing mood of many of the (Blue) Jam sketches.

At the turn of the millennium, the various iterations of the (Blue) Jam material were at the vanguard of a notable British wave of troubling or surreal television comedy, alongside the likes of Human Remains (BBC 2, 2001), The League of Gentlemen (BBC 2, 1999-2002), The Mighty Boosh (BBC 3, 2004-7) and Monkey Dust (BBC 3, 2003-5).[6] Material from one of the longer Blue Jam monologues about a suicidal journalist also provided the premise for two spoof columns co-written by Chris Morris and Robert Katz for the Observer newspaper in 1999. Appearing under the pseudonym of Richard Geefe, and documenting a narcissistic writer's decision to commit suicide, the 'Second Class Male' and 'Time to Go' columns were ostensibly a critique of self-indulgent broadsheet columnists, as well as a reaction to the vogue at the time for death-related columns by the likes of Ruth Picardie and John Diamond. But the linguistic inflections and content of the twelve Richard Geefe columns betrayed Morris's distinctively absurdist worldview, and his involvement was eventually disclosed by the newspaper. Morris continued his association with The Observer with the 'Absolute Atrocity Special' of 2002, a satirical commentary on the reportage of the 11 September attacks, co-written with Armando Iannucci. Similar ideas were explored via the Smokehammer website and the Bushwhacked series of 'cut-ups' of George W. Bush speeches, distributed online and in a mixture of formats.[7]

Morris's subsequent forays into narrative-led work – the sitcom Nathan Barley (Channel 4, 2005) and the 'terrorist' comedy Four Lions (2010) – generated debate over their ambivalent political stance and their success in incorporating provocative

subject material within the more 'conventional' formats of sitcom and ensemble comedy. Nathan Barley was a six-part sitcom, co-written with Charlie Brooker, and based on a reprehensible character in TV Go Home, Brooker's satirical listings website.[8] Generally received as a judgement upon cool-chasing urban trendsetters (particularly associated with the Hoxton area of London) as personified by the (in his words) 'self-facilitating media node' twenty-something Nathan Barley, the show documents the rise of crass reality television formats, vacuous style magazines, musical 'mash-ups', celebrity artists, stylish mobile telephones, Banksy-style graffiti art, and self-promoting websites, whilst also critiquing the commodification and ironisation of emotional subjects such as underage sex, victims of the Twin Towers attacks, and offensive racial epithets, in the service of 'cool' slogans, raps, webpage graphics or fashion-spreads. The 'rise of the idiots', as embodied by Barley, is lamented by the jaded thirty-something journalist Dan Ashcroft, but his earnest sister Claire, an aspiring serious documentary-maker, sees greater potential – and for a short while, sexual appeal – in Barley's media savvy and charisma. The mutual dependencies of the three main characters, which shift and change as the story progresses, gives the show a sense of structural purpose as well as an alignment with the psychological acuteness of The Office (BBC 2/BBC 1, 2001-3) and other comedies of embarrassment; Barley's growing self-realisation of his gullibility to voguish nonsense dovetails with Dan's self-destructive hostility towards his ostensibly benign nemesis and Claire's pragmatic exploitation of Barley's facilities and money. Yet Nathan Barley received only a lukewarm reception from some fans of Morris, a common criticism being that its rapid editing, nervy camerawork and dense sound mix – often featuring different pieces of music playing simultaneously – was not just overwhelming, but as emptily trendy as the subculture it was mocking.[9]

Whatever the intention, Nathan Barley's simultaneous accommodation of the experiential quality of Jam (and indeed also of the hyperactively edited Brass Eye) and the satirical thrust of the 1990s current affairs shows within a traditional dramatic format was ambitious and quite unique.

Morris's first full-length feature film was the 'jihad' comedy Four Lions, concerning the farcical plotting of an Islamic terrorist campaign by four men from the northern English city of Sheffield. In a telling and much-cited quotation, Morris described the film as exposing the '*Dad's Army* [BBC 1, 1968-77] side to terrorism', his reference to the beloved BBC ensemble comedy about the bungling exploits of the Home Guard during the Second World War an apparent defence against any charge of him exploiting a taboo subject merely for satirical ends.[10] Although the film inevitably did generate criticisms for its perceived tastelessness or ineffectiveness as a comedy, international reviews were generally appreciative of Morris's well-researched humanisation of the 'enemy within' and the low-key docudrama style (see Russ Hunter's chapter in this volume). The hand of Morris the absurdist can be felt in the film's disarming cultural incongruities, from the sight of the suicide bombers dressed up as clownish fun-runners, to the use of an innocuous-seeming children's website, 'Puffin Parade', as a means to discuss their plotting under the police radar. But the *Dad's Army* allusion also seemed an apt means of conveying *Four Lions'* debt to traditions of ensemble capers and comedies, particularly British ones such as The Full Monty (1997) - also set in Sheffield - or Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) that explore the habitually faulty mechanisms of the defensive, disenfranchised male gang.

'Find Out Exactly What to Think – Next!': Fact and Fiction

It is striking that the influence and reach of Morris's comedy is somewhat out of proportion to its volume, viewing figures or readership. The infamous 'Paedogeddon' special of Brass Eye may have been one of the most complained about and critically lambasted programmes in the history of Channel 4, yet its appeal was ultimately niche. Morris's work might thus be most comfortably categorised in terms of cult or niche rather than mainstream appeal, for example in the way that his career has been closely observed, not always positively, by comedy aficionados on websites such as *Cook'd and Bomb'd*.[11] As Sam Friedman explores in his chapter in this volume, Morris's comedy has for many an aura of sophistication, requiring a certain 'cultural capital' - in Bourdieu's famous term - to access and enjoy.[12] A sense of the demographic for Morris's output can be gleaned from the kinds of print publications he has tended to work for, give interviews to, or find recognition within: the up-market, left-leaning broadsheets The Observer and The Guardian, and - particularly in the early stages of his career – the music press such as NME and Melody Maker and the monthly music magazine Select, for which he produced a cover-mounted flexi-disc of material in 1992. In contrast, in the lead-up and aftermath of the Paedogeddon controversy, Morris was vilified in the areas of the British press more associated with the conservative values and perspectives of 'middle-England', most notably the Daily Mail newspaper.[13]

Morris's reception by the various institutions he was worked for has been similarly fraught and complex. During his stint as a weekly broadcaster for BBC Radio 1 in 1994, he was suspended, and removed from future live broadcasts, following an episode in which he appeared to announce the death of the MP Michael Heseltine.[14] The culmination of an antagonistic relationship with bosses at Channel 4,

and particularly Chief Executive Michael Grade, during the build-up and delayed transmission of the Brass Eye series, was the insertion of a subliminal frame in the final episode stating that 'Michael Grade is a Cunt'. In his autobiography, Grade devoted some thought to the problems posed by Morris, noting that he 'recognised a rare talent and felt that Channel 4 had a libertarian tradition that ought to be to accommodate Chris Morris's satire – though, as with lion-taming, the cardinal rule would have to be: never take your eyes off the beast'.[15] However, five years later, Brass Eye had become safely canonised as one of the channel's most important achievements. In a press pack published in November 2002 to celebrate Channel 4's twentieth anniversary, and attributed to the Chief Executive (Mark Thompson), Brass Eye was cited as one of the 'top ten channel groundbreakers'.[16]

A challenge, and indeed a pleasure, for Morris fans has been to source the projects - some quite minor and tangential – that have been undertaken, whether deliberately or not, in relative obscurity. In addition to straightforward acting or creative roles in comedies such as The IT Crowd (Channel 4, 2006-), *I'm Alan* Partridge (BBC 2, 1997-2002) and Big Train (BBC 2, 1998-2002), the less immediately visible work includes collaborative music projects (with artists such as Saint Etienne and Amon Tobin), the spin-off Blue Jam CD, hoax newspaper articles and websites, and even a disguised appearance in a real television chat-show.[17] If Morris has garnered a star persona of sorts, it is as much the aggregate of both textual and non-textual factors; not just the programmes and films, but the peripheral work, the infiltration of other programmes and institutions, the tabloid controversies, and also the mystique around his reluctance to 'break character'.

Morris's cult status can be partially attributed to a reputation for elusiveness and anti-authoritarianism fostered by the circulation of (possibly bogus) legends about

his career - particularly its early phase allegedly involving sackings from radio stations [18]- but also by his disinclination (until relatively recently, at least) to engage in public explanation or contextualisation of his methods and meaning. This has opened up a space, most visibly on fan websites such as Co*ok'd and Bomb'd*, for speculation about past and future projects, and indeed the extent to which Morris has deliberately created a mystique around himself and his work. Although there has been some academic interrogation of the slippery concept of 'cult' television, in terms of text, institutions, fans and authorship, Morris and his work has rarely been examined in this context, perhaps because of the manner in which Morris has worked across media, avoided long-running formats, and had a modest impact beyond the UK. For example, Stacey's Abbott's Cult TV Book, Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Robert E. Pearson's Cult Television and David Lavery's Essential Cult Reader – which all ignore Morris altogether - tend to focus upon traditions of telefantasy, with the first two confining their coverage of comedy programmes to multi-series sitcoms such as The League of Gentlemen and some satirical shows such as South Park (Comedy Central, 1997-), The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and Da Ali G Show (Channel 4, 2000-4).[19]

One reviewer of Disgusting Bliss, Lucian Randall's biography of Morris, and the first full-length book entirely on the subject, suggested a parallel with the notoriously reclusive and perfectionist Stanley Kubrick for his 'indifference to personal celebrity and refusal to supply on-demand defences against outrage', and to Orson Welles for his apparent disdain for authority figures, not least television bosses, his connection with notorious 'stunts' (in Welles's case the War of the Worlds radio broadcast of 1938) and the pursuit of a highly individual vision (rather than bankable, repeated formats).[20] Morris's inclination towards privacy, particularly in the lead-up

to Brass Eye, was in some respects a necessity for the effectiveness of his 'stings' in that show, yet it opened up a space for speculation on his psychological drives and satirical purpose. As insignificant as this apparent reclusiveness might seem given that auteurs are not automatically presumed to be knowable, media-friendly presences, Morris's early career as a radio DJ and a sketch-show performer sharing his own name may well have led to expectations of him pursuing a traditional career as media celebrity; in fact, since the Brass Eye special of 2001, Morris has not appeared on screen in his own work, limiting his role to some apparent cameo vocals in Nathan Barley, and the voice-over of Rothko the dog in the short film My Wrongs.

This evasiveness of context and category extends to the way in which Morris's projects have often been broadcast, promoted or commodified in a deliberately misleading or cryptic fashion. Jam and Nathan Barley were broadcast without traditional opening titles, whilst Jam substituted the customary list of credits for a flickering weblink to online information. Jam was broadcast on a commercial television station without the customary advertisement break, seemingly so as not to disturb the programme's oneiric mood, but elsewhere Morris has used devices to disrupt the traditional safety buffers between shows and their surrounding flow. Two Brass Eye episodes contain sketches purporting to be a live report ('Decline') or an advertisement for another show ('Paedogeddon') that are positioned between the 'end of part one' title and the commercial break proper, and – as Dean and Hand discuss in their chapter – the first episode of Blue Jam incorporates a 'fake' news bulletin at the juncture where a genuine one might logically be positioned.

Such subversion extends to extra-textual promotion. As Brett Mills notes in his chapter on the regulatory response to the controversial 'Paedogeddon' episode of Brass Eye, the programme received its greatest censure for a brief trailer that was

deemed to inadequately establish its status as parody; fans may have been ingratiated or warned by stylistic clues such as Morris's characteristic hyperbolic language, but casual viewers may have missed the satirical and auteurist cues. Similarly, Nathan Barley was promoted through an advertising campaign that included posters that seemed, on a casual glance, to be a promotion for a plausible, if ridiculous, new brand of the 'WASP T12 Speechtool' mobile phone; the phone is alleged to have a giant number five button (as the most common number) and to be 'shark-proof'.[21] In keeping with Morris's infamous disinclination to explain or contextualise his work, the British DVD releases of Brass Eye, Jam and Nathan Barley can be considered as further exercises in mystification and parody. In each case, the front and back covers give only vague clues as to genre and authorship; for example, the only text, other than the title, on the initial sleeve of the DVD release of Jam were on stickers promising '300+ minutes of disgusting bliss' and 'extras' including 'one crashing airliner, eight tones of geese and a fifty foot plutonium bum'. The DVD menu itself was no less playful, featuring visually altered versions of the six programmes in 'miniaturised', 'Lava Lamp', 'FFWD', 'pong', 'speeded up and then slowed again to original duration' and 'first nineteen seconds' form, as well as an option to watch all simultaneously. The Brass Eye DVD featured a digressive commentary track on the 'Drugs' episode that would appear to involve Morris soliciting reactions to the programme from six homeless people with assorted drug and drink addictions, whilst My Wrongs has a stilted and transparently pre-prepared commentary from a supposed 'runner' from the film that quickly becomes a rambling survey of dog representations and references throughout movie history. The DVD of Four Lions, like many other Morris-affiliated releases, contains hidden features – in this case, behind-the-scenes footage - that require some dedication and patience to locate.

Morris's gravitation towards longer-form storytelling and the broader canvass of film, as signalled by his output of the 2000s, might be considered quite conventional, at least for British comedy writer/performers.[22] Similarly, there are numerous historical precedents, from *Hancock's Half Hour*/ Hancock (1954-9 on radio, 1956-1961 on BBC television) to Little Britain (2001 on radio, 2003-6 on BBC television), for the transference of his radio programmes to television. But taken as a whole, his output - straddling media and genres, and encompassing sitcoms, sketch shows, feature films as well as numerous side-projects – is a daunting prospect to interrogate.

This may be one of the reasons why, despite being occasionally cited in academic discussions of such issues as satire, mockumentary, news values, postmodernity and comedic taste, Morris has gained only limited critical attention, and mostly in relation to the institutional, regulatory and ethical questions posed by his satirical news shows The Day Today and Brass Eye. This volume is therefore the first to offer sustained critical analysis of his output, from the 'apprenticeship' years as a regional radio DJ to his work on Four Lions, a feature film with international aspirations. The multi-disciplinary specialisms of the book's contributors, which range from film and television studies to media theory, cultural studies, theatre studies and sociology, give some indication of the continuing relevance of Morris's work across a broad critical spectrum, and the scope it offers for theoretical enquiry. But they also point towards the resistance of Morris's oeuvre as a whole to straightforward categorisation or an overarching critical framework. Moreover, the chapters here demonstrate the necessity for an interdisciplinary, intermedial approach when dealing with a body of work that is both idiosyncratic and emblematic of wider comedy trends. In doing so, this collection resists the tendency in existing scholarship

on British film and television comedy for a reductively narrow focus on topics such as nationality, authorship/performance, genre, representation and offensiveness. At the same time, Morris's ruthless critiques of systems of language - from the aggressive tabloid-speak and exaggerated visuals of Brass Eye to the irony-laden youth slang of Nathan Barley and the pornographic pillow-talk – 'whack my bonobo!', 'disagree with my balls!' - of (Blue) Jam – offer a challenge to anyone daring to submit them to academic analysis. Writing about comedic strategies, and Morris's in particular, through a theoretical lens is to risk accusations of humourlessness or of jargonism. Furthermore, Morris's own description of his creative impulse as an 'attack on certainty' can be read as an entreaty of sorts for a plurality of interpretative strategies.[23]

'Confused Face?': Satire and Surrealism

Any sustained auteurist analysis of Morris's output must carry the caveat that he has tended to work collaboratively, as indicated by the various co-writing credits mentioned above. But most accounts take as a starting-point the relatively non-contentious notion of Morris as the dominant, guiding force behind (Blue) Jam, Brass Eye and Four Lions, and also one of the key drivers behind The Day Today and Nathan Barley. Any book devoted to the work of an individual creative presence inevitably takes as its starting point a degree of coherence, whether in content and style, or in working method. Possibly as a result of Morris's enigmatic status, there has been some speculation, by some fans and journalists, upon the significance of his family background, education and even his visible facial birthmarks (covered by make-up for appearances in 'character') for the development of his general iconoclasm and certain persistent topics of interest.[24] A pursuit of this

autobiographical line of enquiry might well, for example, uncover connections between his upbringing as the son of two doctors and the repeated role of 'rogue' doctors in Blue Jam, whilst his undergraduate degree in zoology (at Bristol University) goes some way to explaining the recurrence of quirky animal imagery across his work.[25] As interesting as this may be, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider, for instance, how Morris's 'apprenticeship' period in broadcast radio, and his status as a music-lover and sometime musician (in performing bands) would inform his craft (see the chapters by Ian Greaves and Justin Lewis in this volume).

Popular and critical discussion of Morris has tended to identify two driving impulses: a satirical, iconoclastic critique of popular and political culture through techniques of parody and exaggeration, and an exploration of comedic language, tone and juxtaposition that can be related to traditions of surrealism and absurdism. Whilst it is fair to see The Day Today, Brass Eye and Nathan Barley as prime expressions of the first, and Jam, My Wrongs and Four Lions of the latter, it is more useful to acknowledge how these satiric and absurdist tendencies intertwine in complex and distinctive ways. To take just one of countless examples from Brass Eye, the section detailing a hoax campaign against the evils of 'heavy electricity' flattening Sri Lankan villagers includes a plea from Richard Briers, best known for his career as a sitcom actor, who is made to say: 'can we stand around and eat pies while they're flattened like flies, swatted by the tail of a mad, invisible horse?' On one level, this functions as just one example of the programme's substantial critique of the supposed 'expertise' of celebrities who are persuaded to give voice to erroneous campaigns. And yet, for those who share Morris's sense of the ridiculous, what Briers is tasked to say, and the manner in which he does so, is simply funny in itself, in the same way as the Monty Python 'Ministry of Silly Walks' sketch (1970) or Vic Reeves's impression of the

then Masterchef (BBC 1/BBC 2, 1990-2001) presenter Loyd Grossman in The Smell of Reeves and Mortimer (BBC2, 1993-5) are readable as broad parodies of, respectively, government bureaucracy and a particular celebrity with a mannered delivery style, yet are surrealistically, incongruously funny in themselves.

However, scholarship on Morris has tended to emphasise its satirical purpose. Stephen Wagg, for example, notes a 'direct lineage' between the 1990s current affairs spoofs and the so-called 'satire boom' in Britain during the late 1950s and early 1960s.[26] Its most famous manifestations were the Beyond the Fringe revue (premiered in 1960s), the magazine Private Eye (1961-) and the BBC television programme That Was The Week That Was (TW3) (BBC, 1962-3), all reckoned to have helped inaugurate, or at least captured, a declining deference to media, religious and state institutions. As Wagg notes, the association of Iannucci and Morris with a mission to prick pomposity in public figures harks back to the inclination of TW3 to parody the media as much as politicians. Whereas other contemporary satirists such Mark Thomas and Michael Moore have challenged prevailing orthodoxies, Morris seeks to 'subvert the idea of orthodoxy' itself, symbolically melting down 'all current affairs discourse and [pouring] it into a pot marked "Pompous"', and in doing so vindicate a 'postmodern' acceptance of the 'futility of political intervention'.[27]

Morris's work has been frequently drawn into analyses of the workings of media power, and discussion of the potential of satire to simultaneously critique and exercise 'symbolic power'. Using a concept derived from Pierre Bourdieu, John Thompson has defined 'symbolic power' as the ability to 'intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and indeed to create events, by the means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms'; such symbolic forms include information and ideas transmitted by media, educational, government, religious and

other institutions, with news reporting a significant place and means for the exercise of symbolic power.[28] The Day Today and Brass Eye can thus be read as an interrogation of the exercise of symbolic power, using exaggeration to expose the conventions of news and current affairs broadcasting. As a 'representation of social and cultural authority, in which authorised storytellers present the pronouncements and activities of other authorities', news can be understood as a system of textual authority, and thus a target for critique.[29] Graham Meikle identifies numerous areas of satirical focus in The Day Today and Brass Eye: the contemptuous persona of Morris the anchor-man, the tendency towards visual literalism and the use of graphics to impose authority, and the critique of 'high-status sources', supposedly authoritative spokespeople forced to make preposterous statements.[30]

Satirical news programmes, and 'mockumentary' more widely, have been subjected to generous academic scrutiny, not least because of the clear parallels between the workings of satire and the similarly deconstructive purpose of academic analysis, but also because of the ways in which 'fake' news blurs distinctions between fiction and non-fiction.[31] Meikle sums up the significance of fake news shows as follows:

> Fake news is an important part of a television landscape in transition, as producers and viewers respond to the possibilities of increased choice and control (Lotz, 2007); to new technological possibilities for production, distribution and reception (Meikle and Redden, 2011); and to shifting contexts of popular culture, in which contending claims on authority, identity, and attention compete with those of formerly accredited experts (Jones, 2010). Fake news is an in important part of a complex televisual environment in

> which questions of real and fake are in ongoing tension, and which all forms of factual programming depend on increasing degrees of artifice in the pursuit of the real (Kilborn, 2003; Roscoe and Hight, 2001).[32]

Morris's work has been compared with equivalent 'fake' news shows such as Jon Stewart's The Daily Show. Barbra S. Morris describes how both Morris and Stewart 'deftly discredit tired conventions, overblown untrustworthy rhetoric, and simplistic Morse code-like storylines', thus leading viewers towards the 'higher ground of textual discrimination: good television news analysis'.[33] However, whilst Stewart is able to function as a 'trusted voice on the issues within the news', his show blending news and entertainment, Morris is more interested in exposing the 'textual and cultural machinery of news and current affairs'.[34] If The Daily Show is fake in refusing to 'make claims to authority and authenticity, as opposed to those claims repeatedly asserted through the techniques and conventions used by the news media' [35], a programme such as Brass Eye 'does make those very claims to authority and authenticity, through the force of its satire staking out an alternative position from which to critique authority'.[36] In doing so, these programmes come quite close to the ways in which postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard have conceived of a media-generated 'hyper-real' world of popular culture where the distinction between appearance and substance is blurred. As Morris's presenter figure declares near the start of the 'Sex' episode of Brass Eye, after breaking away from energetic sexual intercourse: 'if this were really happening, what would you think?'

Morris's 'alternative' position has come up against criticisms that, as with much satire, his stance against certain problems of popular and political culture is uncommitted and contradictory. Peter Wilkin identifies a 'mockery of a dumbed-

down England of mass culture, moral decline, popular idiocy and shallow intellectual depths as personified in the rise of a facile celebrity culture',[37] yet Morris has also been accused – particularly in light of the 'Paedogeddon' furore – of being a symptom of moral decline in pandering to audience prurience and bad taste. For Wilkin, a useful context for Morris's inscrutable position on popular culture is a tradition of what he terms 'Tory anarchy', where Morris can be placed alongside the likes of Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell and Peter Cook, whose satire of British institutions and social structures might be understood as a lament for their decline. All allegedly 'upper-middle class, public school and university educated',[38] they share a critique of conformity in popular culture, a moral critique of social norms, a surrealistic imagination, and an awareness of the media's power to shape notions of 'reality'.[39] Thus, the Brass Eye special was a 'classic example of Tory anarchist provocation, holding up a mirror to the hypocrisy of contemporary society without a need for a didactic moralism in order to make its point'.[40]

Whatever his intentions, Morris's ambivalent satirical stance opens up a space for a range of possible viewer positions, which is not without its potential problems. In an article focussing upon representations of gay sexuality in Brass Eye, David Walton acknowledges the possibility of 'double coding'. Jokes about the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' AIDS, the 'gay' practices exposed on the fictitious HMS Watford, or the use of 'Portillo' as prison slang for 'look out behind you', can be interpreted in one or more of the following ways: 'as a satire of arrogant self-righteous journalists and an exposé of their attenuated humanity, dogmatic attitudes and prejudice against drug users or the gay community; pure comedy with no vested interest in the issues; or actually exploiting, and thus reproducing, popular prejudice'.[41] This third possibility is described by Walton as the 'Alf Garnett

syndrome', named after a character in the British 'race' sitcoms Til Death Us Do Part (BBC 1, 1965-75) and In Sickness and in Health (BBC 1, 1985-92) who was intended as a caricature of bigotry, but received sympathetically in some quarters.[42]

Morris's debt to traditions of 'surrealist' comedy and literature has tended to be downplayed in analysis of his satire, but instructive connections can be made, for example, with the 'nonsense' writings of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, the musical parodies and experiments of Vivian Stanshall and The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, the collaborations of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, and even possibly the work of modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett in the case of (Blue) Jam. As Wilkin observes, programme such as Jam and Brass Eye are able to fuse surrealist images and ideas with more mundane representations of familiar, everyday life to 'force the viewer to radically revise the way in which they approach and interpret TV shows'.[43] In a neat historical link with a prominent forerunner in British comedy, Morris recorded and edited a series of improvised, discursive radio interviews with Peter Cook in 1993 that were broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in the form of five ten-minute conversations in January 1994. With Cook playing the role of his recurring Sir Arthur Streeb-Greebling character, and Morris adopting his aloof presenter role, Why Bother was essentially a comedic duel between a young pretender and an ageing legend, each drawing the other into bizarre and sometimes subversive flights of anecdotal fancy; Morris taunts Streeb-Greebling/Cook about being at the end of his life (this would prove to be one of the ailing Cook's last projects before his death in 1995), and conversational detours include an outrageous discussion of Streeb-Greebling's plans to clone the fossilised remains of the infant Christ. Tim Crook has evaluated Why Bother as 'probably the most inventive and exciting comedic improvisation [Morris] has been involved in', and Harry Thompson has claimed that Morris was 'one of the

few performers about to match Peter [Cook] for speed of thought and surreal invention'.[44]

As Brett Mills points out, in an article on developments in British television comedy of the new millennium, Morris's work exemplifies a move towards 'comedy vérité' as found in landmark programmes such as The Office, which deploy an 'observational' style indebted to contemporaneous developments in reality television. Morris's work in The Day Today and Brass Eye 'demonstrates the active, questioning nature of comedy vérité, in which conventional television techniques intended to disguise processes of mediation are laid bare for comic purposes'.[45] Elsewhere, Mills has suggested how the 'experimentalism in Morris's work is only meaningful because it reacts against, and plays around with, the generic expectations of comedy aesthetics'.[46] But he also laments how the novel aesthetic forms pioneered by Morris, for example in Jam, have tended to be 'appropriately purely as visual trickery, detached from the social purposes which were their original aim'.[47]

'What Seems to be the Problem?': Approaches to Morris

In its sole focus upon one of the key figures of British comedy, this collection identifies the diverse ways in which Morris's work is unique and pioneering, whilst also giving a nuanced account of how it connects with broader currents in media culture and politics, and how it has been received and understood. The book follows a broadly chronological approach, with most chapters using a case-study of a particular programme, film or phase in Morris's output to shed light on their authorial, institutional, generic, regulatory, media or reception contexts. In this way, the contributions here marry textual and historical analysis of Morris's work with insights

into the differing ways it can be conceptualised. It is a testimony to the richness of Morris's work that certain projects and themes are given only limited attention within these pages. For example, Why Bother, Morris's radio conversations with Peter Cook, demand further analysis as a 'missing link' between generations of satirists, and there is unquestionably scope for more nuanced consideration of Morris's versatility as a performer and mimic, and the representation of gender across his work.

The first two chapters, by Ian Greaves and Justin Lewis, take as their focus the 'apprenticeship' years that Morris spent as a young radio performer. Greaves considers the period between 1984 and 1991 when Morris worked for a variety of regional UK radio broadcasters. This was a period of significant institutional change in national and local broadcasting, with producers offering opportunities to untested broadcasters such as Victor Lewis-Smith, Armando Iannucci and Morris in an attempt to reach younger audiences. As Greaves explains, Morris and his peers had opportunities to hone skills and comic personae in the relative safety of regional radio, which gave access to editing facilities that allowed for multi-layered experimentation, but also in turn provided inspiration for the sequences in On the Hour that mocked the parochialism of regional broadcasting. In this way, Greaves' chapter complements the story of Morris's early radio career as told by Lucian Randall in the Disgusting Bliss biography, for which Greaves and fellow contributor to this book Justin Lewis were consultants. As Greaves discusses, the general shifts in both broadcasting culture and comedy industry were the framework through which Morris developed his craft between 1984 and 1991. For much of this period of obscurity he was a minor player in the grand scheme of things, but the story in this chapter is a telling reflection of his determination as a radio innovator, as well as the challenges that face any creative endeavour within the media machine.

Although attention is often paid to the ways in which Morris's various satirical projects have been inspired by the culture of the broadcast newsroom, there has been less consideration of his engagement with traditions of popular music. The chapter by Justin Lewis explores how prior to Morris's national breakthrough via On the Hour in 1991 he was primarily a DJ and musician, and as keen to mock the pomposity of the era's broadcast DJs as he was the narcissism of newsreaders. Another parallel between the spheres of music and news during this era was the simultaneous development of soundbite culture among politicians and journalists, and sampling culture among DJs, producers and remixers who would repeat or re-contextualise a musical or lyrical motif. Lewis draws a connection between Morris's comedic use of sampling and the techniques of hip-hop producers and, in particular, the pop 'pranksters' KLF, one of whose tracks seems to have inspired the title of his Radio Bristol show No Known Cure. As Lewis notes, Morris's fascination with musical cultures would extend into his later career, from the pop parodies in The Day Today and Brass Eye to the 'mix-tape' format of Blue Jam.

The five subsequent chapters by Craig Hight, Dan North, Jeremy Collins, Brett Mills and Sam Friedman offer an array of perspectives upon the televisual satires The Day Today and Brass Eye, in relation to form, visual language, politics, broadcasting regulation and popular reception. For Hight, in highlighting and critiquing the drift of television news away from public service ideals within an increasingly competitive commercial environment, The Day Today and Brass Eye can be fruitfully understood as part of a long-established and global strand of mockumentary. Hight compares Morris's work with other prominent examples of news satire, such as The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Both Morris and The Daily

Show carefully recreate the codes and conventions of news presentation then tease aspects of it into unexpected directions to reveal the nature of their construction to viewers. But whereas The Daily Show offers political commentary, Morris is more concerned with deconstructing the language of news, and using stunts to broaden the critique to television's role itself within the manipulation of social and political debate.

Dan North extends and focuses this consideration of Morris's deconstructive strategies by concentrating on the use of graphics and special effects in the news satires and elsewhere in Morris's work. North identifies Morris's use of a hyperbolic 'newspeak' of neologism and mixed metaphors as one of the distinctive satirical aspects of The Day Today and Brass Eye, and locates its visual equivalent in the programme's mimicry of the graphics and sound effects of news programming. The pontificatory rhetoric of news programmes is critiqued through graphs, idents and transitions that strive to assert authenticity and certainty, whilst undermining their authority though exaggeration and nonsensical content. For North, Morris's various projects offer a cohesive thesis on how hypermediation – the foregrounding of format at the expense of truthful or consistent content – is the inevitable consequence of mediated communication.

Using the 'Drugs' episode of Brass Eye as a detailed case-study, Jeremy Collins draws parallels between the programme's satirical treatment of media and political hysteria and the findings of theorists of 'moral panics'. Collins's starting-point is the formal definition of 'moral panic' by Stan Cohen in the 1970s, since when it has been used and refined by social and media researchers in the analysis of topics relating to issues of public anxiety, criminal activity, risk-taking and deviancy.[48] With its concentration in individual episodes upon particular areas of moral panic, Brass

Eye can be read as a comedic critique of the issues that have come to dominate the field of moral panic studies, whose proponents have identified and explored key aspects of media construction (such as exaggeration and the promotion of 'moral entrepreneurs'). Collins finds similarities between the way that Brass Eye imagines and promulgates the dangers of the fictitious drug 'cake', and the manner in which the British media dealt, more than a decade later, with the emergence of mephedrone as a worrying new drug trend.

Brett Mills's chapter uses the controversy around the Brass Eye 'Paedoggedon' episode to raise questions about broadcasting and comedy's place within it. The confusion and outrage triggered by Morris's work generally, and particularly by Brass Eye, can be seen to highlight the social tensions inherent in all comedy, as well as the problems caused for broadcasters and regulators. Mills deconstructs the response of the Broadcasting Standards Commission (the BSC) to the complaints made against Brass Eye, a programme that triggered public discussion about the acceptable use of humour, the way in which viewers are guided to make sense of programmes, and the purpose of regulatory bodies in responding to the diversity of viewers. As Mills puts it, the furore over Brass Eye exemplifies discussions about the very purpose of television itself.

The role and reactions of viewers is explored in detail in Sam Friedman's chapter on the reception of Chris Morris by contemporary British comedy audiences. Using quantitative and qualitative data from a broader study of comedy taste, Friedman demonstrates that the comedy of Chris Morris appears to strongly divide audiences according to their levels of 'cultural capital', to use a term drawn from Bourdieu's famous conceptualisation of the workings of class distinction. In his survey, Friedman found that audiences associated with higher levels of cultural capital

tend to report strong preferences for ‘difficult’ programmes such as Brass Eye, those from lower cultural capital backgrounds expressed dislike or indifference, some being offended at the content. Taking this idea further, Friedman demonstrates that for some respondents responding positively to the ‘complexity’ or ‘darkness’ of his work, Morris was a key instrument in the expression of ‘distinction’; such aesthetic distancing represents an important means through which the culturally privileged draw significant aesthetic, intellectual and moral boundaries between themselves and other social groups.

The achievements and contexts of the radio sketch show Blue Jam and its televisual equivalent Jam are scrutinised in chapters by Rob Dean and Richard J. Hand, and Jamie Sexton. Both chapters discuss the ways in which the programmes, whether in audio-visual or purely sonic form, attempted to control and sustain a dream-like mood through language, performance, sound effect and musical choices. While Dean and Hand make a persuasive case for the pre-eminence of Blue Jam as a unique experiment in radio soundscape, Sexton counters that to dismiss Jam as inferior is to underestimate its own distinctive power as an ‘ambient’ television show. Both chapters unpick the tensions in the programmes between satirical and ‘experiential’ content. For Dean and Hand, Morris’s experimentation in Blue Jam represents an apotheosis of audio comedy, but also an exploration of the alienating essence of the medium itself, not least through the programme’s use of disembodied and computerised voices. At the same time, the deconstructive urges behind Brass Eye and other Morris projects is made manifest in Blue Jam’s use of spoof radio ‘trailers’ and a disorientating ‘cut-up’ of a news bulletin. In relation to Jam, Sexton explores the connections with musical cultures and the mental states associated with particular drug cultures and depressive states, as well as the programme’s treatment of

moral panics (for example around rogue doctors) and its critique of the way childhood and children are socially sanctified.

David Walton's chapter deals with the 'Absolute Atrocity Special', co-written by Morris and Armando Iannucci for The Observer, as a spoof reaction to the six-month anniversary of the events of 11 September 2001. Walton examines the reception of the article at a time of considerable sensitivity around the military response to the terrorist attack, when neither intellectuals nor celebrities (such as the outspoken country act, the Dixie Chicks) were safe from censure for daring to comment in an 'unpatriotic' fashion. Walton finds common ground between the deconstructive strategies of 'Morriucci' (in other words, the combined force of Morris and Iannucci) and the manner in which theorists such as Baudrillard and Barthes have conceived, respectively, of processes of mediatisation and 'de-anchorage'. Morriucci's no-holds-barred approach, described by Walton as a 'blunderbus' attack, takes as many swipes at celebrities as world leaders and politicians, but their key area of satirical target is the commodification and dislocation of the 'image-event' of the 11 September attacks.

In his chapter on Nathan Barley, Adam Whybray argues that the programme's simultaneous critique and adoption of an 'ironic' mode is ultimately problematic and self-defeating, in diminishing the satirical potential of its exaggerated vision of urban trend-setters in the mid 2000s. As well as considering the show's place within the oeuvre of the co-creator Charlie Brooker, Whybray explains how the programme responds to, yet also in some respects anticipates, developments in social media and Internet 'memes', and attempts to critique an over-saturation of irony in Internet culture, and by extension British culture. Although the characters and setting of Nathan Barley are rooted in a particular time and place, and represent a

geographically narrow phase of youth culture that had lost currency by the time of the programme's broadcast, they nevertheless prove symptomatic of an insidious 'post-ethical' mindset, wherein immoral behaviour is justified and excused by irony. For Whybray, the very nature and style of the series prevents it in the end from ever breaking free of this airless 'loop' of irony. In this light, Nathan Barley can be read as a commentary upon, and for some a symptom of, certain tendencies in British comedy of the early Twenty-First century, namely a wave of programmes and comedians – such as Jimmy Carr, Frankie Boyle, Ricky Gervais and Little Britain - that deliberately transgress boundaries of taste of decency, but in a knowingly playful rather than immediately satirical fashion.

The final three chapters shed light on the comic mechanisms, reception and broader political context of Four Lions. Sharon Lockyer begins her chapter by noting how media and public commentary on the film, whether supportive or dismissive, took for granted the film's status and intention as a comedy. Her analysis of how Morris's comedy operates in his first feature-length film is informed by what she identifies as the key theoretical explanations of humour (superiority, incongruity and relief). For Lockyer, Four Lions demonstrates a complex interplay of different types of humour, including linguistic misunderstanding, demonstrations of the 'stupidity' of the 'enemy' and cathartic explorations of morbid or scatological subjects. Nevertheless, as Lockyer argues, the 'transgressive' possibilities of the film are ultimately hampered by Morris's over-arching satirical impulse, and indeed by the restrictions of satire itself, which arguably poses more questions than solutions. Indeed, Lockyer identifies the specificities of some of the cultural references in the film - such as to the Sainsburys supermarket chain or the Alton Towers theme park - as a potential hindrance to non-UK viewers, and this issue of de-contextualisation is

addressed in Russ Hunter's chapter on the journalistic reactions to the film in the UK and US. Hunter draws from a critical reception studies methodology to examine the way that press reviewers responded to its handling of an emotionally loaded subject with culturally specific frames of references. Of particular interest here is the way that American correspondents, in many cases, came to Four Lions with only a cursory first-hand knowledge of Morris's work and reputation, factors that greatly coloured the way in which the film was dealt with in the UK. The final chapter in the book, by David Rolinson, deconstructs the notion of Morris as 'media terrorist' by focussing upon how his work directly on the topic of terrorism correlates with debates around broadcasting tropes and legislation. Drawing from the field of scholarship relating to terrorism and war in the media, Rolinson draws connections between the satirical 'Bombdogs' sketch of The Day Today about a fictitious Irish Republican Army mainland campaign involving explosives hidden in animals, and the sustained treatment of the subject of terrorist campaigns in Four Lions. In tracing a line of continuity between a programme and a film at almost opposite ends of Morris's career, and between a sketch-show comedy and a feature-length, theatrically relased film, Rolinson implicitly makes a case for Morris as auteur (despite the fact that both texts are of course multiply authored, as highlighted by numerous contributors here). The marriage of detailed textual analysis and contextual eludication in Rolinson's concluding chapter is in some respects a summary of the dominant impulses within and across all of the chapters here to acknowledge both the richness and density of Morris's work and the way it enlightens our understanding of the media and our relationship to it.

'You've got Bad AIDS!': Morris and the Academy

One of the many 'extras' on the DVD of The Day Today is a short documentary made by the Open University on the subject of news language.[49] It features sections where some of the creative team behind the programme discuss their methods and targets. As if in recognition of the dangers of 'academic' study sapping comedic impact, this feature is described on the DVD menu as 'po-faced analysis'. The editors and contributors to this volume naturally believe that the comedy of Chris Morris, and comedy more generally, is deserving of serious scrutiny, whether or not this might be deemed a somewhat humourless undertaking. A recurrent question raised across the chapters is that of the nature of comedy itself: its limits, its possibilities, its failures, and its capacity to say meaningful things.

Many of the contributors, either implicitly or explicitly, make a case for the similarly 'deconstructive' manoeuvres of satirical comedy and academic theory. Furthermore, Morris's work, particularly the news satires, has strong pedagogical value for teachers and lecturers wanting to demonstrate aspects, for example, of media theory, news values, postmodernity or regulation. But to focus exclusively on the utilitarian aspects of the comedy of Chris Morris at the expense of a consideration of its fascination and pleasures is surely to take it in the wrong spirit. Any reader who has made it this far will probably not need warning that this book not only contains jokes, but citation and discussion of material that some might - and indeed some do - find offensive, upsetting, vulgar, excessive or simply in poor taste. Although the contributors in this book approach Morris's work from quite differing analytical perspectives, and sometimes come to disagreements as to its relative merits or satirical effectiveness, there is overall consensus that it is funny. Not just funny, but

inventive and taboo-breaking, rewarding of repeated viewings, listens and readings, and most definitely unworthy of a po-faced response.

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[1] Kevin Maher, 'Chris Morris – The Most Hated Man in Britain', The Times (3 April 2000), <http://www.cookdandbombd.co.uk/forums/index.php?page=cabkbarticle&id=414>

[2] Tara Conlan and Alison Boshoff, 'Is This the Sickest TV Show Ever?', The Daily Mail (28 July 2001, p. 1), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-62209/Is-sickest-TV-ever.html>. The programme was also labelled 'sick' in headlines in The Sun (27 July 2001), The People (29 July 2001, p. 2), The Daily Star (30 July 2001, p. 9) and elsewhere.

[3] References to Morris as 'media terrorist' are commonplace online and in print. Here is a representative sample: Unknown Author, 'Chris Morris: Camera Shy Media Terrorist', SkyMovies (22 February 2012), <http://skymovies.sky.com/feature-chris-morris-camera-shy-media-terrorist>; Dylan Ryhmer, 'Chris Morris – Media Terrorist', The Comedy Couch (date unknown), < http://www.comedycouch.com/reviews/chris_morris.htm>; Xan Brooks, 'Chris Morris: "Bin Laden Doesn't Really Do Jokes', The Guardian (1 May 2010), < http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/may/01/chris-morris-four-lions-interview>.

[4] Will Self, 'Chris the Saviour', The Observer (9 March 1997), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/1997/mar/09/featuresreview.review>.

[5] The 'Dead Parrot' sketch from the first series of the BBC comedy *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC 1/BBC2, 1969-1974) is arguably one of the most famous in British television comedy. It concerns a confrontation between an angry customer (John Cleese) who returns a deceased bird to a shopkeeper (Michael Palin).

[6] See, for example, Claire Monk, 'London and Contemporary Britain in Monkey Dust', Journal of British Cinema and Television (4:2, 2007), pp. 337-60. For a general overview of television comedy of the period see Ben Thompson, Sunshine on Putty: The Golden Age of British Comedy From Vic Reeves to The Office (London: Fourth Estate , 2004), Edwin Page, Horribly Awkward: The New Funny Bone (London: Marion Boyars, 2008), Robert Allen Saunders, The Many Faces of Sacha Baron Cohen: Politics, Parody and the Battle over Borat (Lanham, Md: Lexington, 2010).

[7] Chris Morris and Armando Iannucci, 'Six Months that Changed a Year: An Absolute Atrocity Special', The Observer (17 March 2002), <

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/17/september11.terrorism>. The Smokehammer websites contained satirical news stories relating to the war on terror, with headlines including 'Chief aim of war is now to "avenge death of George Harrison" – Blair'. Produced in two volumes, they are dated 16 November and 6 December (2001). They have been archived at the *Cook'd and Bomb'd* website at <http://www.cookdandbombd.co.uk/forums/index.php?page=morrismirrors>. The Bushwacked speeches were 'cut-ups' of speeches by the US President George W. Bush, now made to utter phrases such as 'the American flag stands for corporate scandals, recession, stock market declines, blackmail, burning with hot irons, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, terror, mass murder, and rape'. The Bushwhacked mp3 files, apparently made in 2001 and 2003, have been available in various places and formats, such as on the Smokehammer website at <http://thesmokehammer.com/>, the Warp Records website, a twelve-inch single with remixes, Youtube and as a 'hidden' extra on the DVD release of The Day Today.

[8] The TV Go Home website, a parody of television listings magazines such as Radio Times was published between 1999 and 2003. It has been archived at <http://www.tvgohome.com/index.html>

[9] For example, see the long message board thread on *Cook'd and Bomb'd* that begins with the website's author's review 'Nathan Barley – it's well rubbish': <http://www.cookdandbombd.co.uk/forums/index.php?topic=6745.0C>

[10] Morris cited in Genevieve Roberts, 'Wannabe Suicide Bombers Beware: Chris Morris Gets Go-ahead title', The Independent (6 January 2009), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/wannabe-suicide-bombers-beware-chris-morris-movie-gets-goahead-1228152.html>

[11] *Cook'd and Bomb'd* is an online comedy forum which initially had an emphasis upon the careers of Peter Cook and Chris Morris (its name incorporating the name of the former and also that of the 'hoax' anti-drug campaign group of the 'Drugs' episode of Brass Eye). The site has also archived available recordings of Morris's radio work, as well as media interviews, reviews and discussions.

[12] See Friedman's chapter in this volume for an a discussion and application of Bourdieu's work on taste and cultural capital, as well as Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (London: Routledge, 1984).

[13] See Sharon Lockyer and Feona Attwood, '"The Sickest Television Show Ever": Paedogeddon and the British Press', Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture (7:1, 2009), pp. 46-60.

[14] For an account of the 'Heseltine' controversy, see Lucien Randall, Disgusting Bliss: The Brass Eye of Chris Morris (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), pp. 134-9.

[15] Michael Grade, It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 258-9. For a full account of the build-up and delay of Brass Eye, see Randall, pp. 176-197.

[16] Channel 4 Press pack published to mark Channel 4's twenty-year anniversary (2002), <http://www.channel4.com/media/documents/corporate/foi-docs/4_at_20.pdf>.

[17] Morris appeared on the live daytime discussion programme The Time, The Place (1987-98) in June 1996, posing as an academic in a discussion called 'Are British Men Lousy Lovers'; he was exposed by the host, John Stapleton. This has been posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ecxW3KPUD4>.

[18] For an overview of some of the legends attached to Morris, such as the story of his sacking from BBC Radio Bristol after filling a broadcast newsroom with helium, see Randall, pp. 53-67.

[19] Stacey Abbott (ed.), The Cult TV Book (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (eds), Cult Television (Minneapolis, Minn and London: University of Minnesota, 2004)David Lavery (ed.), The Essential Cult TV Reader (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 2010).

[20] Ben Walters, 'Chris Morris: the Orson Welles of British Comedy?', The Guardian Film Blog (14 April 2010), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2010/apr/14/chris-morris-four-lions>

[21] For a discussion of the 'subvertising' methods used to promote Nathan Barley see Rick Poynor, Designing Pornotopia: Travels in Visual Culture (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2006).

[22] Other comedic writers/performers who have made the transition from British radio and television, to films (some with an international aspiration or reception), include Ricky Gervais, Sacha Baron Cohen, David Baddiel, Armando Iannucci and Steve Coogan.

[23] Chris Morris in podcast interview with Adam Lippe, A Regrettable Moment of Sincerity (8 November 2010), <http://regrettablesincerity.com/?p=6023>.

[24] See Randall, p. 33.

[25] For an account of Morris's formative years, see Randall, Chapter 2.

[26] Stephen Wagg, 'Comedy, Politics and Permissiveness: The "Satire Boom" and its Inheritance', Contemporary Politics (8:4, 2002), p. 330.

[27] Wagg, p. 332.

[28] Graham Meikle, 'Naming and Shaming: News Satire and Symbolic Power', The Electronic Journal of Communication (8:2, 3 & 4, 2008), <http://www.cios.org/www/ejc/EJCPUBLIC/018/2/01847.html>, John Thompson, The Media and Modernity (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

[29] Graham Meikle, '"Find Out Exactly What to Think-Next!: Chris Morris, Brass Eye and Journalistic Authority', Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture (10:1-2), pp. 14-26.

[30] Miekle, 2008.

[31] For discussion of fake news see, for example, Geoffrey D. Baym, From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News (Boulder, CO: Paradigm 2010), Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones and Ethan Thompson (eds), Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-network Era (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), Jeffrey P. Jones, Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement (2nd ed.) (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), Janet Roscoe and Craig Hight, Faking It: Mock-documentary and the Subversion of Factuality (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

[32] Meikle, 2012, pp. 14-5; Amanda D. Lotz, The Television Will be Revolutionized (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), Graham Meikle and Guy Redden (eds), News Online: Transformations and Continuities (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Richard Kilborn, Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), Janet Roscoe and Craig Hight, Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

[33] Barbra S. Morris, 'Come and Get It!: Television News Criticism: American and British TV Comedy Versions', The Journal of British Cinema and Television (3:1, 2006), p. 48.

[34] Meikle, 2012, p. 25.

[35] Jeffrey P. Jones, Entertaining Politics, p. 18.

[36] Meikle, 2012, p. 25.

[37] Peter Wilkin, '(Tory) Anarchy in the UK: The Very Peculiar Practice of Tory Anarchism', Anarchist Studies (January 2009), p. 11. See also Peter Wilkin, The Strange Case of Tory Anarchism (Farringdon: Libri, 2010).

[38] Wilkin, p. 5.

[39] Wilkin, pp. 16-7.

[40] Ibid, p. 17.

[41] David Walton, 'Britain Through the Looking Brass: Brass Eye, Homophobia, Deconstructive Manouevres and the Alf Garnett Syndrome' in María José Coperiás Aguilar (ed.), Culture and Power: Challenging Discourses (València: Universitat de València, 2000), p. 254.

[42] For more detailed analysis of comedy and issues of representation and taste, see Sharon Lockyer (ed.), Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (eds), Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Stephen Wagg (ed.), Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

[43] Wilkin, p. 13

[44] Tim Crook, Radio Drama: Theory and Practice (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 127; Harry Thompson, Peter Cook: A Biography (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 457.

[45] Brett Mills, 'Comedy Vérité: Contemporary Sitcom Form', Screen (45:1, Spring 2004), p. 77.

[46] Brett Mills, '"Yes, it's War!": Chris Morris and Comedy's Representation Strategies', in Laura Mulvey and Jamie Sexton (eds), Experimental British Television (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 180.

[47] Ibid, p. 192.

[48] Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics (3rd ed) (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2002).

[49] The Open University documentary on news reporting, featuring some discussion of the making of The Day Today, is part of the 'English Language' series, and is included on the DVD of The Day Today.